

TESTIMONY of STEPHEN JARMOC

Before the General Law Committee

February 19, 2015

IN SUPPORT OF:

HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS

Senator Leone, Representative Baram, and members of the General Law Committee,

I am pleased to present this testimony in support of HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS. As a third-generation Connecticut tobacco farmer, I realize the value and importance of supporting the state's agricultural heritage.

Tobacco farming has a long and rich history in Connecticut, dating to the 1630s and continuing to the present day. CT-grown shade and broad leaf tobacco wrapper is highly sought after for use as wrappers for premium cigars, and the quality of Connecticut tobacco has an international reputation. As a result of this demand, shade and broad leaf tobacco is the state's No. 1 agricultural export in dollars, bringing in more than \$30 million a year into the state.

Currently, in Enfield alone, where I operate our family's Jarmoc Tobacco Farm, there are over 500 acres of wrapper tobacco under cultivation on eight farms. All told, there are about 1,500 acres of tobacco under cultivation in Connecticut.

Being primarily a family business, farming in Connecticut depends on the continued interest and effort of each generation and demand for the crops we produce. We are all aware of how vulnerable our family farms are, the investment costs of growing shade tobacco, planting the crop alone can cost up to \$30,000 an acre. As a result of these pressures, the acreage of land within the CT River Valley under tobacco cultivation has fallen from a high of 20,000 acres to the present level.

Allowing Connecticut package stores to sell cigars will help to support Connecticut's tobacco farms and promote the value of this product within the state's economy. Our sister state of Massachusetts, which also produces shade tobacco, has recognized this and allows the sale of cigars in package stores. Connecticut should follow suit.

Accordingly, I urge the Committee to approve HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS.